

RECONCILIATION, FORGIVENESS AND VIOLENCE IN AFRICA

BIBLICAL, PASTORAL AND ETHICAL PERSPECTIVES

EDITORS

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TRANSFORMING (CHRISTIAN) APARTHEID

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FROM CLENCHED FISTS TO OPEN HANDS

Ugandan Catholic Archbishop John Odama visited Belfast in March 2012, towards the end of my decade as a peace practitioner on the island of Ireland. During this visit a few colleagues and I spent a precious few hours around a small, round table with him. He told us about going into very dangerous remote areas to meet with leaders of the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA), including the notorious Joseph Kony. For Archbishop Odama it was about being true to his calling as a peacemaker. He also talked about the Acholi Religious Leaders Peace Initiative (ARLPI), which includes the Anglican Archbishop, an Orthodox Christian leader and a Muslim Imam.² He then demonstrated his solidarity with humanity by relating to my colleagues how he prayed for them during the "Troubles", the euphemistic term often used for the deeply rooted, bloody conflict in and about Northern Ireland. He fasts every Thursday and prays for every conflict in the world that he is aware of. Then he held up his hands in the familiar gesture of prayer – with the palms and fingers against each other – and slowly explained what these two hands symbolise for him. Each finger represents one of the five continents; one hand stands for men, the other for women; his light brown palms bring to mind all people who are light-skinned, the dark brown on the outside reminds him to pray for all people of color.

I was deeply moved that such a simple gesture could become the symbol of compassion without borders. Spontaneously I began to thank him: "Archbishop Odama, you make me realise again how much I miss South Africa, you remind me so much of Archbishop Tutu..." Searching for words I continued, "But I am also filled with sadness. When I think of the tragedy of apartheid, of the fear amongst the Afrikaners, the community I come from..." Without thinking about it I started to clench my hands into two opposing fists, "This is what I grew up with!"

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2 For more details see Katongole (2017:14): "John Baptist Odama was installed as archbishop of Gulu diocese, in Northern Uganda, in 1999, where from 1986 until recently a group calling itself the Lord's Resistance Army [LRA] waged war against the Ugandan government, terrorised the civilian population...and abducted over 23,000 children as a means of recruitment into their fighting ranks. Odama became a fierce critic of the war, moving back and forth between Kony's fighters and the Museveni government seeking to mediate an end of hostilities, building a coalition of cultural and religious leaders (ARLPI) ..."

Pointing to my fists, “These are the contracted, inward-looking, fearful, defensive, confrontational hands that I grew up with, which caused so much destruction to others...and ourselves. What a contrast with your all-embracing hands!”

Again without much premeditation I started to open my clenched hands into that prayer gesture, with the soft, vulnerable palms touching each other. Looking at my colleagues I wondered out loud, “Is this not what our peace work is about? How do we transform closed fists into united hands...that stay open, and connected, despite so many risks?”

CHRISTIAN VIOLENCE

A number of chapters in this book reminded me of this powerful encounter, of the tragic contrast between my white, Afrikaner Nationalist, Dutch Reformed Church fists and the open-hearted hands of so many fellow Christians represented by people like John Odama and Desmond Tutu (see Verwoerd, 2019; Van der Westhuizen, 2016). An underlying theme in these chapters is the stark contrast between the ongoing, multi-dimensional contribution of the Christian religion to those violent fists, versus the life-giving, transformative, radically inclusive potential of a faith imbued by the kenotic Spirit of Christ.³

In my experience a major challenge for real, deep reconciliation is making this closed-fists-open-hands contrast fully visible, especially when the fists have become collective, institutionalised, systemic and span across generations. Botha’s critique of (white, Western) Christianity’s service of “Empire” and Brown’s post-colonial, feminist challenge to the “Son of Man” ideology expand my understanding of the long religious fingers that continue to enclose racialised power and privilege. These chapters affirm the need for a nuanced, far-reaching religious dimension to “white work” in the current South African context of growing black disillusionment with shallow rainbow-reconciliation (see also Thesnaar chapter and Forster 2017, 2018).⁴

Sadly the challenge of making the alarming connections between Christianity and violence visible is not restricted to the more systemic level. Other authors in this book highlight the more obvious, physical, intergroup violence that Christians continue to also be involved in, for example, Nigeria, Ethiopia, and Burundi.

However, even these highly visible, physical killings of Christians killing (mostly) other Christians are typically “explained away”, as pointed out by Michael Budde (2016:5):

3 See K. Armstrong (2014) *Fields of Blood: Religion and the history of violence* regarding religion and violence in general.

4 The cultivation of self-critical intragroup awareness and a creative sense of shared historical responsibility, especially within the Dutch Reformed Church, has indeed become an increasing focus of my facilitation practice since returning to South Africa at the end of 2012. The purpose of this “white work” is preparation for more humble, restitutive involvement in reconciliation across apartheid divides. On “white work” in the South African context see Steyn (2001, 2012) and within the Dutch Reformed Church see Van Wyngaard (2011).

World War I is described as interstate rivalry run amok, not the industrial butchering of Christians of one another; Rwanda symbolises the ugliness of ethnic conflict rather than Catholics massacring Catholics; the U.S. wars in Central America are charged to the Cold War account instead of Christians in the United States abetting the killing of Nicaraguan, Salvadoran, and Guatemalan Christians by one another. That no one describes these events as a scandal to the gospel, a cruel inversion of the unity of the body of Christ, is among the most embarrassing charges against contemporary Christians.

I was alerted to Budde's work by Ugandan-Rwandese theologian Emmanuel Katongole (2017) in his recent book *The Journey of Reconciliation: Groaning for a New Creation in Africa*. I strongly resonate with much of what he writes about his (theological) journey to discovering "Word made flesh" reconciliation as the heart of his faith. With my own personal-professional journey in mind and two recent visits to Rwanda fresh in my memory, I identified in particular with the profound questions raised for him upon visiting the country of his birth a few years after the 1994 genocide. Standing in "horrificed silence" in the church of Nyamata, one of the killing fields during the genocide, he asked himself: "How could this have happened in this beautiful and deeply Christian country? Why was the Catholic Church [70% of population, Protestant 15%] never able to provide a bulwark against the slaughter of Rwandans by their neighbours, but was rather, as some cases indicated, a contributing factor in the killing?" (2017: 66).

His heart was filled with more questions, questions which apply to all the above examples of Christians – directly and indirectly, individually and collectively, physically and structurally – killing other Christians: "Was all the talk of new identity, new life with God nothing but mere spiritual platitudes that actually meant very little in the 'real' world?" With refreshing honesty he probed even further: "What, then, is the relationship between one's biological, national, racial, or ethnic identity and the reality of baptism? Does the blood of tribalism run deeper than the waters of baptism?" (p.67)

I'm hesitant to use the language of "tribalism" given the primordialist, ahistorical overemphasis on "God-given" ethnic identities within the apartheid ideology of "Separate Development" (Verwoerd, 2019). But Katangole's troubling question about the depth of the "blood of tribalism" lies at the heart of my own personal and my professional journeys of reconciliation.

Most of my facilitation work on the island of Ireland was with former combatants and survivors from across the political spectrum. Gradually I came to appreciate the complex interplay between British-Irish-Northern Irish ethno-national identities, Protestant-Catholic sectarian divisions and more working class-based Loyalist-Republican organisational and regional dynamics. In a context where the majority of those involved would describe themselves as Christian the answer to Katangole's question is an overwhelming "yes". I saw first-hand that for most people the "blood" of family type group bonds run deeper than the blood circulating in the veins of the body of Christ, especially when the human boundaries of belonging are sanctified by (sectarian) religion and soaked in the sacrificial, covenantal blood of martyrs.

The same can be said of the Afrikaner “white tribe” that I’m linked to, where “Christian” revealingly functioned as an adjective within the ideology of “Christian Nationalism” that shaped my socialisation and education in pre-1994 South Africa.

RECONCILIATION AS BETRAYAL?

My emerging understanding is that the scandal of these answers will not (only) be changed by righteous indignation, by moral judgment or prophetic theological condemnation. Transforming this “cruel inversion of the unity of the body of Christ” (Budde, 2016) demands, perhaps firstly, a willingness, to go deeper into Plato’s cave, a further descent into the dark illusions that keep “Us” opposed to “Them”, before we can start to use the less shadowy, light-filled language of rainbows.⁵ Put differently, a key root of deep reconciliation for me is increasingly about facing the murky, often unconscious reality of exclusive group identities. This underground, dark, root work is not about avoiding shared responsibility for my groups’ violence. This diagnostic phase is intended to inform the shaping of humanising processes, including language, that will actually encourage people with clenched fists to journey *through* the bloodied boundaries of narrow, exclusive belonging into the dangerous, profoundly unsettling territory of enemy love.

For my personal reconciliation journey and my work with “veteran peacemakers” from South Africa, Ireland-Northern Ireland and Israel-Palestine has taught me how truly radical Jesus’ command to love your enemies is – enemies who actually have the blood of “your people” on their hands. For example, during a recent international Beyond Dehumanisation research project, Themba Lonzi summarised the profound challenge of cross-border compassion as follows:

You feel like you are betraying your community and your people by empathising with someone you see as an enemy. [Your] people get angry with you. They will say ‘you’re turning soft now, you’re soft.’⁶

I am also thinking of Chen Alon, the inspirational co-founder of Combatants for Peace,⁷ who participated in the Israel/Palestine leg of the Beyond Dehumanisation project. Despite a strong Zionist socialisation, having lost family members in the Holocaust, he reached a point where he refused to serve as a soldier in the Occupied

5 Alistair Little first formulated this challenge to Plato’s famous analogy of the cave (in *The Republic*), during one of our many late night conversations. See footnote 9 for more detail regarding Alistair’s remarkable journey from killing to peacemaking.

6 Themba Lonzi was an ANC-aligned anti-apartheid youth activist in the 1980s and through a long “healing of memories” process in the 1990s became a dedicated reconciliation-with-justice practitioner. I co-facilitated this Beyond Dehumanisation project between 2012–2014, which involved a series of reflective workshops and interviews, in South Africa, Ireland-Northern Ireland and Israel-Palestine, with small, diverse groups of (mostly) former combatants/veterans who became peacemakers. Quotes from this project are taken from unpublished transcripts of these interviews and reflective workshops.

7 See www.cfpeace.org and their inspiring sister organisation *The Parents’ Circle-Family Forum* (comprising Israeli and Palestinian survivors committed to “breaking the cycles of blood” that cost the lives of their loved ones (www.theparentscircle.com)).

Territories. He became convinced that it would be in the interests of everyone peacefully to change the injustice of the Occupation. Thus working with the enemy, however, broke powerful taboos in his own community:

A few years earlier I couldn't even have imagined doing this. Initially I was terrified. You know I was the son. My parents were proud of their son, a major serving in a combatant unit. All the friends and the family were proud of me. When I told my parents that I am about to form Combatants for Peace the first thing that my mother asked me was, 'Isn't that dangerous for you?'

This working with the enemy was something exceptionally dangerous for her: to be banned, not to belong to society, not to belong to the mainstream, to the narrative ... not to belong to the 'US'.

A very close friend of my parents said to my father, 'I saw the name of your son in the newspaper, but let's not get into it because you know what I think. I think they should put them against the wall and shoot all of them, all these traitors.'

My close colleague, mentor and friend, Alistair Little⁸ dug a bit deeper to explain the above dynamics:

[B]etraying all of what you've been conditioned to believe is the right thing to do, feels like breaking 'sacred bonds'. If you speak out against this conditioning you're 'supporting the enemy' or you're 'agreeing with the enemy'. And therefore the blood of your friends, your community is not only on the hands of the enemy, this blood is also on your hands, because you're supporting those who did the killing.

Those of us involved in violent conflict therefore tend to keep our hands closed, because if we shake hands with the enemy, then those hands also become tainted with the blood of "our people", and then "your people" can turn their fists on you, with the extra intensity of excluding "one of us".

The hard-won practical wisdom of these veteran peacemakers help me to understand why the language of reconciliation can so easily morph into domesticated "spiritual platitudes" (Katongole, 2017a) that leave high walls between conflicting groups intact. For real, radical reconciliation – at least at the levels of interpersonal and intergroup relations – cannot avoid, I believe, the uprooting existential dynamics of betrayal. As the hard-line Northern Irish Protestant political leader, Rev. Ian Paisley, put it while stoking the fires of "the Troubles": "Bridges and traitors have one thing in common, they both go over to the other side." Paisley intended this statement to keep his political flock even more tightly together. In the process he provides another tragic, all too common demonstration of the "cruel inversion" (Budde) of the message of the "Saviour" he professed to follow. For Jesus very clearly stated – "If anyone comes to me and does not hate his own father...he cannot be my disciple" (Luke 14:26-27). And following this Jesus undoubtedly includes "love of enemies" (Matt 5:44)

8 Alistair became involved with a Loyalist (British) paramilitary organisation, the Ulster Volunteer Force (UVF), at the age of fourteen, committed acts of serious violence and was imprisoned for 13 years at the age of seventeen (Little & Scott, 2009).

I am not used to quoting Scripture in writing about reconciliation/(re)humanisation, neither am I a biblical scholar. The chapters by Nel, Endale and others are sobering reminders of the humility and care with which one should approach the biblical text, to avoid, amongst others, the pitfalls of anachronistic, self-serving interpretations. But those verses in Luke 14 (and Matt 10:34-36) played a critical role in my faith-based decision to join the ANC in the early 1990s, despite my father's agreement with Paisley and despite my mother's tears (Verwoerd, 2019). Having been immersed for those 12 years on the island of Ireland in supporting bridge-building between former enemies, I now see a strong connection between Luke 14:26-27 and Matthew 5:44. In other words, I now find it very helpful to understand Luke 14:26-27 not as the long-term rejection of genealogical family or ethnic "family", but rather as a truthful process-oriented, preparatory prediction of the unavoidable in-group relational realities when a group member dares to journey towards the "Other" side.

This intimate, very uncomfortable connection between (intergroup) reconciliation and the dynamics of (intragroup) betrayal is theoretically supported by Thesnaar's very helpful employment of Boszormenyi-Nagy's framework of (horizontal and vertical) "loyalty networks" (chapter 7), as well as Forster's highlighting of the power of social identities (chapter 4). My growing conviction that there is a biblical linkage between enemy love and family hatred can also be fleshed out philosophically using Margalit's illuminating distinction between "thick" and "thin" human relationships (2002; 2017).

"Thin" refers to the basic respect, dignity, non-humiliation that should characterise our relation to all other human beings. As demonstrated by the two paradigmatic models of thick relations – family and friends – these relations are much more limited. "Thickness" is a metaphor for a number of interwoven strands, like trees making up a thick forest, that characterise these relationships. First among these strands is the emphasis on *belonging* rather than *achievement* – mutual care that is to a large degree unconditional is central to family ties and friendship loyalties in contrast to the (often contractually enforced) good performance required to maintain, say, a typical employment relationship. Family type thick relations furthermore contribute significantly to the *meaning* of one's life, which also has to do with the importance of sharing many *memories*.

Much more can be said about the reach and nature of thick relations beyond biological family ties and beyond relationships with the living. At this stage I just want to agree with Margalit that exclusivity unavoidably flows from this kind of thickness. As well as the accompanying risk that distinctions between "family" and "strangers" can slide into "friends" vs. "enemies". When those outside the boundaries of thick relations become enemies it is unlikely that the "thinness" of relations will fulfill its purpose of serving as a bulwark against the dehumanisation of any human being.

For Margalit betrayal amounts to the "undermining of thick relations" (2017), as illustrated by the existential intensity – the emotional and epistemic shock – of, for example, adultery or, more traditionally, apostasy. Judas has become a lasting symbol of betrayal primarily because he was a *friend* of Jesus, Margalit argues convincingly.

This fleshed-out understanding of the dynamics of betrayal resonate strongly with my personal journey as well as the experiences of many veteran peacemakers such as Themba Lonzi, Chen Alon and Alistair Little. Along this way I've come to understand that real bridge-building also requires a journeying through a dark valley of betrayal-of-U's and a sense of self-betrayal. Deep, radically inclusive humanisation demands the transformation of thick intragroup and intrapersonal relationships.

This understanding has significant implications for the language and processes that would be appropriate in the aftermath of violent political conflict. In my experience the language of "perpetrators" and "victims" and the accompanying stress on the need for apology and forgiveness can actually be counter-productive to draw (literal and metaphoric) "brothers-in-arms" into truly facing the consequences of violent actions and to form meaningful (thickish) relationships with (former) enemies. I am *not* questioning the need to fully acknowledge the devastating impact of violence and prioritising the needs of those directly and indirectly affected. I have experienced though the alienating potential of insisting on the need for apology (and restitution) at the *early* stages of reconciliation journeys. For example, many veterans, especially former political prisoners, would not enter the room with survivors/victims at Glencree⁹ if they were expected to apologise at the start of the dialogue. To acknowledge wrongdoing would amount for many of them to a betrayal of their cause, their community, their comrades (especially those who died during the conflict), and the sense of themselves as committed political activists. These participants taught me that not only forgiveness but also apology is a process. And we've found that preparatory "single identity", intragroup workshops and the language of humanising empathy and compassion can open doors to intergroup reconciliatory processes that will hopefully lead to the acceptance of restitutorial responsibility (Verwoerd & Little, 2018a).

Towards an embodied spirituality of reconciliation

A burning question raised by the highly conflictual, deeply disruptive understanding of reconciliation-as-betrayal is this: where does one get the energy, the courage to start and especially to continue this kind of radical relational journeying? What is the taproot of this kind of costly, cross-border compassion?

This question is implicit in Brown's advocacy of pursuing a kenotic genre of Jesus (chapter 6) and in Botha's emphasis that a decolonising approach to mission must be rooted in one's primary relationship with God (chapter 7).

This brings me back to Odama's open hands. In an interview with Katangole (July 2009) he noted that his life has been "one long journey of conversion" and stressed that "we must all learn to see beyond tribe, race and nation – and recognise that we are first and foremost human beings created in the image of God" (quoted in Katangole, 2017:128).

9 The Glencree Centre for Peace and Reconciliation, a residential centre located in a restored British military barracks, in the Wicklow hills outside Dublin (www.glencree.ie). I worked as co-co-ordinator of the Glencree Survivors and Former Combatants Programme between 2002 and 2008.

Katangole then asked the crucial question of “what kept him going through the years of war and fuelled his endless advocacy on behalf of the local population”. Odama responded “it was the practice of setting aside Thursday and spending the entire day in prayer, fasting and meditation before the Blessed Sacrament” (2017:14). In a later interview (Jan 2011) we get more insight into the motivation behind this spiritual practice: “So that I may not take myself too seriously. The mission of peace is not mine. I do not own it. It is owned by God and I am merely the servant ... I take to him what is going on. This time [before the Blessed Sacrament] keeps me focused and I ‘listen’ ... In this way, I can remain hopeful. For I hear God saying, ‘Do not lose hope. Do not be afraid. I am with you always.’ Why a whole day? “Connecting with God takes time. [And] I pray for all humanity ...” (quoted in Katangole, 2017a:132), with both hands, in the way he explained to me in Belfast.

Katangole’s questions spring from his own understanding of reconciliation, with which I resonate strongly. For him questions such as “‘Why go on?’ will constantly confront us at critical times when the cost is high, forgiveness too painful, the hurt too deep, and the resistance too strong” (2017:12). Therefore the journey of reconciliation “requires the cultivation of spiritual and other resources necessary to sustain the journey over the long haul” (2017:xv). He is very clear that this journey is about “the endless advocacy for peace, justice, human rights, and an end to war and violence in the world”, but he stresses that it is also a “deeply personal journey” (2017:12-13). This personal dimension includes cultivating leadership capacities – “for scriptural imagination, mediation, negotiation, patience, and all forms of skillful advocacy and improvisation” (2017:xv), and it involves “intimacy with God” – which requires “moments of prayer, silence, and devotion” (2017:13).

As far as I’m aware this deeply personal dimension of reconciliation is the heart of Archbishop Tutu’s radically inclusive, highly political journey. And this is also my personal experience over the last twenty years. Without a committed discipline of (contemplative) “Centering Prayer” and “Welcoming Prayer”¹⁰ I simply could not sustain my work within the TRC, as a facilitator of cross-border compassion, or complete a book on the transformation of the (individual and systemic) sins of the fathers (Verwoerd, 2019).

As a researcher and as a practitioner I am therefore increasingly convinced that more attention needs to be given to cultivate an embodied spirituality of reconciliation. My own interest is the potential contribution of a contemplative root in this spirituality, drawing on the apophatic tradition represented by *The Cloud of Unknowing* (Verwoerd, 2018b). I am particularly interested in learning how to more fully understand and more effectively finesse the “amygdala factor” (Fitzduff, 2015), which seems to be a significant bodily contribution to conflict and violence. I am fascinated by the encouraging evidence emerging from the burgeoning field of contemplative neuroscience, affirming the potential of dedicated contemplative practices to, literally, rewire the brain towards less reactivity, towards reducing the instinctive power of our fight-flight-freeze (fisting) “old brain”, and towards increasing “new

10 See Keating (1994), Bourgeault (2016), www.contemplativeoutreach.org.

brain" (prefrontal cortex) capacity for compassion (Goleman & Davidson, 2017; Troskie, 2018). My hunch is that this provides a fruitful connection with our call as Christians to participate in the mystery of the Incarnation. Especially when so many people directly and indirectly affected by violence live with the embodied realities of trauma. The language of "trauma" opens up a huge new theme, but at this stage I just want to point to the promising connection between trauma healing and "re-fleshed" spiritual practices such as yoga (Shoop, 2018, Van der Kolk, 2014).

I hasten to add that an embodied spirituality of reconciliation also needs to have an ecological dimension, as alluded to in the Chapter by Brown. Again, this is not the place to go into much detail. I just want to mention that nature-based activities in the Wicklow mountains outside Dublin, in the Scottish highlands and especially five day wilderness trails in Hluhluwe-Imfolozi Nature Reserve in South Africa grew into a central strand of the "Journey through Conflict" approach that my colleague Alistair Little and I developed over a period of 10 years (Little and Verwoerd, 2013). Underlying this approach is an understanding that sustainable peace requires a "trinity" of healthy relationships between people, between people and God, and between people and the environment. This understanding inspired me to become part of the Lynedoch EcoVillage since my return to South Africa at the end of 2012. This small potential prototype of semi-rural land reform is an attempt practically to combine an ecological vision with concretely addressing the legacy of racial (and class) separation in South Africa.¹¹ The founders of our village were inspired by the Schumacher College's approach, beautifully captured in these words by Satish Kumar (2000):

Even an event as historically important as the French Revolution presented only a one-dimensional vision. Its cry – *Liberté, Égalité, Fraternité* – was a social trinity. The natural world and the spiritual dimension were left out. Americans created a trinity of life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. This, too, lacks the ecological and the spiritual dimensions. In recent times the New Age movement developed a personal trinity – Mind, Body, Spirit. But this replaces one partial view with another... Over the years Resurgence has explored, examined and expounded a holistic trinity: Soil, Soul, Society. Soil represents the natural world: we come from the earth and return to the earth... While we respect soil, we also take care of the soul, which is the vessel for mind, body and spirit. [Social stands for] social justice, restrained consumption, sustainable economics, a sense of community and the diversity of cultures... This trinity of Soil, Soul, Society is one single reality, for each is always implicit in the other.

With this broad and deep vision of corporeally, socio-politically, ecologically embodied reconciliation in mind I want to conclude by returning once more to Odama's hands, my symbolic fists and Katangole's haunting question about the 'deepest' blood.

11 See www.sustainabilityinstitute.net/lynedoch-ecovillage

RESISTING THE LURE OF DRAGON'S BLOOD AND RESTORING TENDERNESS

Dorothee Sölle's (1990) *The Window of Vulnerability: A Political Spirituality* helps me to see that the hands I referred to around that table with Archbishop Odama were not only clenched in fists. They were also covered in invisible scales - my socialisation during the heyday of apartheid shared the spirit of Siegfried, the most powerful hero in German mythology. Sölle explains that "[h]e kills a dragon and bathes in the monster's hot blood. This bath gives him a horny skin no sword can penetrate; he becomes invulnerable." The dream behind this myth is "a male fantasy, to be the strongest and at the same time to be invulnerable. Dragon's blood is the sacramental sign of the powerful. They have bathed in it. They want to wall up all the windows. No light is to peak in; nothing must ever touch them" (1990:ix).

Her contextual application of the power of "dragon's blood" to wealth in the West can also be applied to 'whiteness' and white South Africans in particular. She echoes Forster's (chapter 4) warning against language of "post-apartheid": "Wealth functions like a wall, much more impenetrable than the famous Berlin wall. We [members of First World] keep ourselves apart, we make ourselves untouchable; our wall is soundproof, so that we cannot hear the cries of the poor and oppressed. Apartheid is not merely a political system in one country in Africa; apartheid is a particular way of thinking, feeling and living without consciousness of what is going on all around us. There is a way of doing theology without ever letting the poor and the economically exploited become visible and audible – that is apartheid theology" (p.17).

She continues to describe how "dangerous" the transcendence of genuine religion is, because "it makes us vulnerable". It therefore becomes so tempting to worship the "idol of invulnerability in the name of 'security'", a "false transcendence that has reduced itself to the otherworldly and the individual". In language that reminds me of Brown's contribution she leaves no room for superficial reconciliation in the name of Christ: "The masculine myth of the invulnerable hero is opposed to the unarmed carpenter's son from Galilee: there is nothing here to harmonise. [I]n Christianity [vulnerability] is driven to the limit: in Christ, God makes Godself vulnerable."

I am inspired by this kind of political spirituality.¹² And I am reminded of the practical wisdom of fellow South Africans with whom I am privileged to do reconciliation work that feels real. During the South African leg of the Beyond Dehumanisation research project, sitting in a circle on the edge of District Six in Cape Town, Themba Lonzi highlighted the need for hardened combatants to become "tender" again.

"My experience of the past has hardened me. And in order for me to feel tender, I have to really connect with people coming from different backgrounds, at a point when I get to question myself and my actions and my perceptions."

Pumla Gobodo-Madikizela responded warmly: "This notion of restoring the tenderness is so important. It's such a simple statement, but it's really the crux of the

12 See also Sölle (2001), Katangole (2017b) and Holmes (2017).

matter. People commit these terrible deeds - they lose this sense of tenderness, either towards themselves or towards the other. And that's why it's possible, then, to hurt the other in so many ways, because there is no connection - the natural connection, the human connection of tenderness towards another is gone.”¹³

In a later workshop Themba Lonzi made it clear that the tenderness required by (re) humanising reconciliation is not to be confused with “becoming soft”:

I think it's one of the toughest choices when you choose the path of trying to reconcile people. I think the easiest thing is to pick up arms and fight. I think for me that's very easy. But the most difficult is to try to bring people together.

13 Prof. Gobodo-Madikizela (Chair, Studies in Historical Trauma and Transformation Studies, Stellenbosch University) was a participant at this workshop and has published widely on trauma and reconciliation-related themes. See, for example, Gobodo-Madikizela (2003, 2016).

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